

History of the Fire Department

Message from the Chief: Then & Now

"The earliest recorded date that I have heard mentioned of an organized fire department in the Town of Beaufort is in the year 1866. A petition was received from the Oceanic Hook & Ladder Co. through their committee asking for an appropriation for the benefit of said company. The Town provided funds to help build structures that could house the department's equipment that consisted of hand-drawn hose carts, chemical carts and pump carts. There were several of these buildings constructed throughout the Town. These buildings were only big enough to house the equipment. During this time, the Town did not have a public water system. Water for fire protection was provided by the many artesian fire wells scattered throughout Town. Firemen were alerted to a fire by the use of bells and the cry of "Fire!" and would send men running to the fire stations for their equipment.

By 1907, the department had changed its name to The Robert E. Lee Fire Co. In 1908, the fire station was relocated to the 100 block of Craven Street, where it housed two fire companies segregated by race. The first company consisted of 24 white volunteers with one Howe Triplex gasoline engine, one hose cart with 800 feet of 2.5-inch hose and 1,000 feet of 2.5-inch hose in reserve. In the second company, there were 20 black volunteers with one hand engine, one hose cart with 800 feet of 2.5-inch hose. The two companies worked side-by-side for many years fighting fires in Beaufort. As time went by, the department used horse-drawn pumping engines and hose carts. By the early 1900s, the Town had installed a public water system and fire hydrants.

By 1940, the Town had built the fire station in the 400 block of Broad Street across from the county courthouse and jail. By this time, the department used gasoline fire engines with pumps, a water tank, hose and ladder. The department had one American La France Triple Combination motor truck with a 1000 gpm pump and one Darley Triple Combination 500 gpm pumper. A Game Well Fire Alarm System was installed and consisted of fire alarm boxes placed throughout Town connected to a whistle on top of the water tower located behind the fire station.

By early 1960, the department had two fully paid driver/engineers and 49 volunteer members. They worked with four trucks: 1927 American La France 12 cylinder chain drive engine with 1000 gpm pump; 1934 Darley engine with a 750 gpm pump; a homemade 1947 Dodge Ladder truck with a 50-foot hand-cranked ladder; and a homemade 1948 Dodge engine with a 750 gpm pump.

Beaufort has seen its share of big fires throughout its history. One of the most memorable fires that I can remember as a child was on Aug. 4, 1966, while standing on courthouse square,

watching the fire station burn down. The fire started after the department's 1927 American La France engine back fired and caught fire. The Town rebuilt the station at 900 Cedar Street.

Today (2019), we cover a fire district of about 25 square miles serving a population of just under 12,000. We have a Fire Prevention program that reaches about 500 Pre-k through sixth grade students each year. We provide yearly employee training for adults in local businesses, daycare centers, adult care facilities, federal, and state and local government agencies. Our commitment to the public is to provide the best possible service to those that we strive to protect from the ravages of fire.

Our department has continued to try and meet the varied demands of the public. Our call volume has grown from 434 calls in 2007 to 1,256 calls in 2018. The majority of this increase has been due to our department starting our Medical First Responder program in 2008. This program helps provide Emergency Medical Care personnel on scene faster.

Our department provides services for the municipal area of the Town of Beaufort and the outlying rural areas around Beaufort. We are supported by the Town's General Fund and fire tax through a contract with Carteret County for fire protection in the rural area.

We are a combination department with career, part-time, volunteer Firefighters, Chief, Assistant Chief and a Fire Administrative Specialist. We operate out of two stations. Our main station was built in 2016 at 506 Live Oak Street replacing the outdated main station at 900 Cedar Street. Our Station 2 was built in 2013 at 2731 Hwy 101. We operate with three engines, two tankers, one tractor drawn 100' tiller, one brush truck, one utility support vehicle, one fire boat and two command vehicles.

With the demand for services growing, we need, and I encourage, citizens to join the department and volunteer. There is no greater service than when you are in the service of your fellow man. There are many different jobs that need to be done on an emergency scene. Some involve interior firefighting, search and rescue, exterior firefighting operations, equipment management, accountability, rehabilitation of emergency personnel, scene safety and control, vehicle extrication, marine related emergencies just to name a few. Our community has a lot of people with varied levels of knowledge and talents that we could certainly use. We can help train you or you can get your training through our local community college. Applications can be picked up at our main station or downloaded from the Town of Beaufort's webpage. Please stop by, speak with our staff and take a tour."

Retired Chief Larry W. Fulp (April 2019)